

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING – MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2009 – 9:30 A.M. ROOM 2B

Bill No. HB6375 Sec. 1 – Subsection (55) (56) (57) (58) and (61)

Testimony by: Hubert J. Barnes, Business Manager, UA Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 777

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone, and members of the committee, my name is Hubert Barnes, Business Manager for Local 777, Plumbers and Pipefitters and a journeyman member of the Plumbing and Piping Work Board. Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion on HB 6375.

As a concerned citizen, a business person, and member of the Board, I believe we would be doing an injustice to every consumer----- those people in your districts who hire plumbers, pipefitters, sprinkler-fitters, electricians, or elevator installers to work on their homes, their offices, their stores, their apartment buildings, or their manufacturing facilities, if these Occupational Licensing Boards were eliminated.

My main objection to the bill is the termination of the licensing boards listed in sections 55, 56, 57, 58, and 61, effective October 1, 2009, "unless they are re-established according to Section 2c-10 of the general statutes." It is obvious that the intent of this bill is to just eliminate these boards, along with many others listed, in an effort to save the state money. However, the licensing boards for the trades are strictly volunteer and the members of these boards only get reimbursed for mileage. I cannot speak for the rest of the Plumbing Board but if all it takes to keep the Board is to give up the mileage then so be it. All the Boards that HB 6375 will effect are members that care about their profession and their State. The monetary reward is not the reason we serve and the savings realized by the elimination of these boards would be minimal..

As a licensed tradesperson, I served a five-year apprenticeship in Connecticut and was grateful to have a licensing board of professional people who set the standards and established the amount and type of experience and training required to qualify an applicant for an examination for a license. At least I knew that when I got my license, it was worth the piece of paper it was written on, and I knew that I had been trained under the highest of standards.

The boards are comprised of both union and non-union journeymen and contractors who have expertise and follow the trends in the industry. They know if new materials are introduced in the trade and new methods and techniques are needed for installation and use of these new materials, or if more advanced methods and techniques, which are more energy efficient or enhance safety, become available. The boards also set the parameters for the courses offered for continuing education required by statute and determine the specific area of a trade for which limited licenses will be issued and the areas for which no license will be required. The boards also have "public members".

I was also an Occupational Licensing Inspector for the Department of Consumer Protection for over six years and have first-hand experience on the value of the Occupational Licensing Boards.

The Governor's budget proposes an increase the licensing fees. That's fine, but to take away the Occupational Boards would take away the State's vital volunteer expertise in the specific trades. This action would be detrimental to training and licensing of qualified plumbers and pipefitters and other trades' people and in turn, be detrimental to the safety of the consumer and the citizens of this state.

The budget deficit is a problem and I realize that, but elimination of these boards will have no positive effect on the deficit. My suggestion to help cut the deficit in the area of occupational licensing is to hire more inspectors to catch the unlicensed-unqualified plumbers, pipefitters, electricians, sprinklerfitters and elevator installers and let the legitimate licensed contractors and journeypersons do their work. Enforcement of the licensing laws cannot be properly accomplished with just four inspectors. Better policing of the trades will put the violators out of business. Legitimate licensed contractors pay income taxes, unemployment compensation and workers' compensation. The licensing law violators usually don't, but they will pay the fines when and if they get caught.

I believe I have taken up enough of your precious time and I want to thank you for your service to the citizens of Connecticut.

If you have any questions I would be glad to try and answer them.